Redefining Literacy in Education

Taking a look at the comprehensive nature of literacy and its role in ensuring the critical thinking and effective communication skills needed in the 21st Century.

Reading and writing has, in the 21st century, been expanded to include technological literacy, visual literacy, media literacy, math literacy, cultural literacy, social studies, science, English, financial and emotional literacy, innovation and more.

As well as the ability to access information, process it and use it to solve a problem.
Curriculum in Context

Redefining Literacy in Education

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Publisher

Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
825 Fifth Avenue SE, Olympia, WA 98501

WSASCD publications do not necessarily reflect ASCD views and are not official publications of ASCD. Curriculum in Context is published twice a year. Manuscripts should be addressed to Lisa Laurier, Whitworth University, e-mail: llaurier@whitworth.edu. The editorial committee seeks articles that provide perspectives, research and practical information about the issues of and ways to improve learning and teaching in Washington State. ISSN 2165-7882

Cover illustration: ThinkstockPhotos.com - #478945030 Blue House Studio
In our work as literacy educators in pre-service teacher education, we recognize that the concept of literacy is undergoing expansion. We have many opportunities to see these growing interpretations of literacy addressed in various ways. The traditional view of literacy as reading and writing has, in the 21st century, been expanded to include technological literacy, visual literacy, media literacy, math literacy, cultural literacy, and more. Common Core encourages this more comprehensive view of literacy as it folds content areas such as social studies and science into English Language Arts at the elementary level. In addition, the inclusion of standards that address speaking and listening emphasize the role that literacy plays in learning across subjects. Learning is a function of communication of ideas and communication requires effective oral and written skills so literacy, in that sense, is the basis for achievement in all disciplines. The ability to access information, process it and use it to solve a problem is a direct reflection of one’s literacy. Our national affiliate, ASCD, recently published an article on financial literacy as yet another strand of literacy acquisition. With this broad view in mind, the articles contained in this edition of Curriculum in Context represent literacy from a variety of lenses.

- Michelle Ziminsky writes about her work as a literacy interventionist and how she sees her role in supporting classroom teachers and enhancing student success through the development of individualized curriculum.

- Laura DeMersseman shares the definition of visual literacy and how strategy instruction can enhance learning across disciplines. She also considers student voice and how ownership over one’s learning can be supported.

- Kristin Souers presents her work in emotional literacy and its role in establishing resilience in the face of trauma.

- Hannah Gbenro provides an overview of implementation literacy as a vehicle to innovation.

- Julie Stannard reflects on her growth as a teacher of writing and her awareness that the developmental nature of literacy acquisition requires her to be flexible in identifying student needs and slowly supporting their growth. Her article on differentiated writing instruction speaks directly to the unique ways that children gain literacy independence.

- Val Laiho considers how her work as a 6th grade reading/English language arts teacher in a rotation setting prepared her to be effective in her current role as a literacy coach.

- Math literacy is a growing area of focus in educational research as it becomes more apparent that many children who are able to demonstrate skill in computational math lack conceptual understanding of how mathematics actually works. Math literacy focuses on student understanding of the ideas associated with all levels of math and how these connect and support effective problem-solving. Ryan Seidel’s article addresses the importance of developing math literacy at the high school level along with strategies for classroom use.

It is our hope that as you read these articles, they will begin to illustrate the comprehensive nature of literacy and its role in ensuring the critical thinking and effective communication skills needed in the 21st Century, and provide a forum for you to reflect on your own work and ways in which you might expand your own view of literacy and your practice as a literacy educator.

The theme for the next journal will focus on Data-Driven Decision Making to Improve Educational Outcomes for All Learners.
Welcome Fall!

In Autumn 2016, some routines have become traditional while we are also experiencing dramatic change. This is always a special time of year for educators and students as we begin a fresh start to the school year. Many processes are the same; teachers and professors begin preparing classrooms in August and students arrive in late August or early September, meetings begin, athletic and music practices start, assessments are given, Yom Kippur, Halloween, daylight saving starts.

This Fall while those same things have occurred there are significant events that are different. It is an important and interesting election year with exaggerated focus and media attention. Racial issues that have often set in the background and lay dormant are entering into conversations and onto campuses. Protests from affluent professional athletes to city neighborhoods and our middle school students are all taking action about racial injustice. Amidst all of our routines and consistencies there are community and societal transformations happening.

We are witnessing and experiencing this change as an international organization, ASCD has a new leader, Executive Director, Deb Delisle who is leading us in a new and different fashion. The ASCD International conference is taking on a changed structure along with a new title, Empower 17 - The Conference for Every Educator. Within our Washington State Affiliate we are transforming also. We have redesigned our state wide Fall conference specifically for teachers. Understanding that teachers have the closest connection to students we have put an intentional focus on supporting teacher learning through the lens of the whole child.

Our board of directors represents every region in our state. Listening to the needs of educators in order to support students is a focus for our organization. We look forward to serving you on your journey and through professional learning. Whether your learning is in person at one of our state conferences or institutes, at the international level at Empower 17 and in reading this journal we hope we are contributing to your learning expedition.

As a teacher who specializes and has a love for literacy, I am excited to share this journal with you. It takes the word literacy to a new level, which I hope challenges your thinking and provides for new insight to the definition of literacy.

ELA Literacy will continue as a constant and maybe a tradition but hopefully this Curriculum in Context issue will challenge and change your view of the definition of Comprehensive Literacy.
Is the Craft of Literacy Coaching Endangered?

When I was a literacy coach, it was incumbent upon me to lead teacher growth, and therefore student learning, in all things literacy in my school. “All things literacy” included everything from curriculum, to instruction, to assessment, in the areas of reading and writing. Yes—reading and writing, that’s it.

As the digital age has seeped into every nook and cranny of our existence, many of us have become familiar with such terms as “visual literacy” and “digital literacy”. The term “assessment literacy” and a near infinite amount of literacies are a part of our world of education, too. Therefore, when asked if literacy coaching is endangered, the answer is yes. And no.

In today’s world, the question is not just whether or not a person is literate, rather, the question is, “Is the person literate in (fill in the blank) subject?” As a result, you are more likely to come across an instructional coach, a math coach, a technology coach, or a leadership coach, and so on. If the person is focusing on good instruction across all content, then instructional coach is the reasonable title. These people are coaching educators to be literate in the identified topic. So, what then, do we call the person who coaches the teaching of reading and writing now? I propose something like “English Language Arts (or ELA) Coach” to be consistent with the current terminology for reading and writing instruction.

Is a Washington State framework trainer for the Marzano Instructional Framework

Currently an administrator (assistant principal) in Puyallup School District

Selecting the Best Content Area or Instructional Coach

The key phrase here is selecting the best. Coaches should never, ever, be the “last man standing” so to speak. It shouldn’t be the person who reluctantly agrees to do the job because no one else will (Boogren, 2016). Nor should the person in the role of coach be the person who really needs to be out of the classroom for the good of the kids; there are other ways to help that person find a better fit, and we all know this. A content area coach should be someone who is a distinguished instructor in that content area; they need to deeply know the language of the content area standards. For example, a math coach should know—and speak—the language and vocabulary of the math standards. An instructional coach should be distinguished in best instructional practices that bridge all content areas; in this day-and-age that also means knowing the language and vocabulary of the instructional framework used in your district. To boot, this person needs to be committed to staying on top of their game through ongoing learning to remain cutting-edge; the type of person that makes a good coach recognizes that even the “best” can still get better. That said, content knowledge, strong instructional best practices, and speaking a common language of instruction are just the tip of the iceberg (Marzano and Simms, 2013).

She or he needs to be not just competent, but compassionate, confidential, collaborative, and communicative. The person in the role of coach absolutely and positively needs to be respected and trusted among staff. In short, the person is not just good with students, they work well with adults. Indeed, the person should be nothing short of a super hero—our well respected, competent, best-of-the-best. If this worries you about taking your best teacher(s) out of the classroom, let me say this: when well selected, an instructional coach will have a far wider reach in the learning of far more students in the new role. Choose wisely.

The Coach Needs to Coach

Coaching itself is a skill. Whomever you put in the role of coach needs to learn to be well-versed in coaching. If they aren’t already well-versed in coaching, I highly recommend making this a priority. It takes training and practice in the art of coaching, regardless of subject matter, to be as effective as possible and have that “far wider reach in the learning of far more students” that gives you the solace of taking that highly effective educator out of their previous role. Sending a person to a coaching conference soon after they are hired as a kick off to the job will pay off in dividends. Following up with ongoing learning and collaboration with other coaches is recommended as well. Any coaching tools or trainings from the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP), Art Costa, Bob Garmston, Laura Lipton, Jim Knight, or Marzano Associates, to name a few, are sure bets.
The Coach Isn't God

I know. You may be feeling like finding a good coach is like finding the Savior of Education. The truth of the matter is, in our world of vast and growing information, no one can know everything. A good coach also knows how to connect people and is well-connected. They recognize their own growth areas and they know (or quickly come to know) the people for whom that area is a strength. And really, educators everywhere have strengths. A very powerful tool for coaches is facilitating learning walks and peer coaching. Everyone has something to offer and something to learn. Facilitating such processes builds more trust and confidence in the coach, colleagues, and each educator’s feelings of self-worth and growth mindedness.

Keep the C’s in Mind

As you ponder literacy’s expanded definition and the power of coaching the vast areas in which we strive to be literate, keep these concepts in mind: competence, compassion, confidentiality, common language, collaboration, communication, and connecting. It’s literacy coaching redefined to just… coaching.

References


Announcing the 2016 WSASCD Award Recipients

Outstanding Young Educator Award

Recognizes the accomplishments of an emerging education leader who achieves excellence in instructional leadership in teaching and learning and shares his or her exemplary practices with the education community.

Courtney Vetter
Fifth Grade Teacher
South Colby Elementary
South Kitsap School District

Healthy School Award

Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a healthy school where students learn about and practice healthy lifestyle.

Meadows Elementary School
North Thurston Public Schools
Angie DeAgular, Principal • Raj Manhas, Superintendent

Safe School Award

Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a safe school where students learn in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.

Centennial Elementary School
Olympia School District
Shannon Ritter, Principal • Dick Cvitanich, Superintendent

Student Engagement Award

Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a school where students are actively engaged in learning and are connected to the school and broader community.

Secondary Academy for Success
Northshore School District
Donna Tyo, Principal • Larry Francois, Superintendent

Supported Students Award

Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a school where students have access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.

Amanda Hall and Olympia High School
Olympia School District
Matt Grant, Principal • Dick Cvitanich, Superintendent

Challenged Students Award

Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a school where students are challenged academically and are prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.

WestSide High School
Wenatchee School District • Kory Kalahar, Principal • Brian Fones, Superintendent

The Whole Child Awards are designed to acknowledge and honor schools that have made significant contributions to student learning by creating a school culture with programs that exemplify one or more of the five tenets of The Whole Child Initiative:

Healthy, Safe, Engaged, Supported and Challenged.
Using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to Deepen Comprehension

by Laura DeMersseman

Understanding Visual Thinking Strategies
I am a teacher at heart and reflective by nature. Due to this I seek out opportunities to enhance literacy learning for myself, but more importantly for my students. I am a Kindergarten through fourth grade Reading Interventionist at an Elementary School. My students are struggling readers and writers; those students who are not yet reading and writing at grade level. Two years ago, one of these learning opportunities presented itself. My elementary school began a partnership with a local museum participating in 22 hours of professional development around Visual Thinking Strategies or VTS. First it is important to understand VTS. The goal of VTS is to use art to deepen learning across school disciplines. It was developed with the intent to build visual literacy, but the results are far greater. Yenawine (2014) explains that for students, “VTS builds a variety of related skills: visual thinking, complex thinking and the language to express it, listening, increasing interest in and capacity to write, and collaborative problem solving. For teachers, VTS provides a strategy to bring out students who often hang back, to level the playing field, to introduce discussion as a vehicle for collective meaning making that extends across disciplines, and to establish a clear means of scaffolding students’ abilities and peer learning.”

The Purpose of Visual Thinking Strategies
The primary objective of the Visual Thinking Strategies protocol is to increase student engagement and participation while deepening thinking, language ability, writing skills, and visual literacy. During a VTS lesson, the students are shown an image and then asked to take a moment to look at the picture. The students are then asked 3 questions: What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? And what more can we find? The teacher is trained to listen, paraphrase, and link. The teacher is central to the process but not the authoritative source.

From Whole Class to Small Group
When I first observed what was happening in the classrooms during the VTS lessons I was impressed. The students were engaged; not only verbally expressing themselves, but also writing in great depth about their observations. I wanted to take these successes and build on them during my small intervention group time.

As soon as I began the VTS training with my colleagues, I saw the value of this model and how it could be used to support my reading intervention students. Bringing the visual thinking strategies into my small reading groups would allow me to provide strategies consistent to those being used in class and I knew this would greatly benefit my intervention students. By asking the questions and looking at the pictures, I could support the students as we front loaded vocabulary, concepts, and language that might occur in the text. I realized a natural place for the 3 questions would be in the reading phase of my lesson during the book orientation. So I jumped right in and when we were doing the picture walk I would ask my students, “What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?” These 3 simple questions combined with the experiences they were having around the VTS lessons in the classroom had a dramatic effect on my intervention students. Previously the students had minimal engagement and I was doing most of the work. Now it was clear the students were more engaged. I gave the students time to look at the pictures and encouraged them to dig deeper. As they noticed, wondered, discussed, building on the thinking of the group; it was the students who were coming up with the vocabulary and language they needed to successfully read the text. Even more encouraging was the fact that I was also seeing this language and vocabulary appear in the students writing responses. I sat back and smiled, realizing the importance of what was happening. I think it can best be summed up by this quote, “Little by little, students talk themselves into understanding bits and pieces of the world we live in as well as the material we want them to learn. They learn how to learn, how to think and how to communicate effectively with others. They use expressive experiences to aid them in writing. Writing is not so much taught as learned, included in school as it is in life, as a useful tool for recording what one thinks and wants to communicate to others. It’s authentic.”

References:
The whole concept of emotional literacy is an important one, especially in the education world. What we know about children and their capacity to learn centers around their ability to feel safe in their environment and their ability to regulate their bodies so they can access those learning capacities. If we can help children understand that emotions in their bodies can trigger a biological response, then we can begin to empower them with tools for how best to manage that response. Keep in mind that all feelings are ok and we need to ensure that our students know this. The crucial goal is equipping them with ways to manage the intensity often associated with the experience of feelings.

Safety, Relationships, and Emotional Literacy

The safety our students feel and their capacity to regulate (the ability to access the part of the brain that allows the students to process, relax, and remain emotionally calm) will allow them to enhance their own emotional literacy. Many schools have social emotional programs that support skill development in these areas, though they aren’t always as effective as they could be. The challenge for many of us is consistency with how we reinforce those learning strategies. An additional barrier that can impact success in this area is the lack of whole staff consent to seeing this as a true value to education. If staff are not committed to this as a value, then the success of students becomes jeopardized.

I have the privilege of working with students in multiple states and I get to partner with staff in these school settings. My primary goal is to support staff in understanding how best to get students to learning ready states—• the mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological readiness to learn. By contrast, if students are not in a learning-ready state, they simply will not learn. The key to being able to do this is to provide a safe environment for students to connect and to also be able to teach them the skills to regulate their bodies so they can learn.

Thanks to the amazing research that has been released in the last decade about the brain and about what a brain needs in order to truly learn, we are more equipped to create those learning ready environments for our students. We also know that true success in learning and in life comes from our ability to regulate our bodies in a way that allows us to have healthy interactions, make positive choices, and to learn.
Self-regulation is necessary for emotional well-being. When we can recognize how external states influence our internal states and how our internal states influence our external environment, then we can begin to successfully maneuver through the lifelong challenge of learning.

Trauma affects self-regulation

The reality is that the capacity of many students living with, or exposed to trauma to do just that is not always easy. To quote my dear friend Natalie Turner, “Stressed brains can’t teach and stressed brains can’t learn.” We know that chronic exposure to stress and adversity can significantly disrupt the development of healthy regulation skills in all of us. We have also learned from the research that the more adversity experienced by a child, the greater the likelihood that he or she will struggle with academic success.

Often, children experiencing adversity have never had the permission to truly develop an emotional vocabulary intended to help them make sense of their world and their experiences. They often just relate to the intensity associated with experience and determine, based on their body’s biological response to that intensity, whether or not it is safe to regulate or if they need to move to more of a survival way of being. If the option becomes survival mode, their capacity to learn and retain and make healthy choice is greatly marginalized, thus affecting our jobs as educators to effectively be able to teach.

I truly believe that when we can empower students to understand their own biology and how stress can disrupt learning, then we can give them a sense of awareness of identifying healthy ways to manage that stress. When we can empower students to understand how stress impacts learning then they can become partners in identifying what they need to manage that stress and return to learning ready states.

What can we do?

These are a few suggestions to help students achieve emotional literacy:

- Teach them about their brain and how their brain works. Help them connect their body regulation to learning. If they can communicate with you that they are moving away from being learning ready, you can support them in finding ways to return to regulated states.
- Provide predictability—help students have insight into what they can anticipate for the day. What can they expect from you? What do you expect from them?
- Incorporate feeling words into your lessons—feeling words can help them connect to the feeling and identify how it can have an impact on learning.
- Provide story problems that encourage them to problem solve and understand healthy ways to handle the situation.
- Provide opportunities for relationship and connection—this will help increase the likelihood that a student feels safe.

As educators, you spend massive time teaching content and academic targets. We must put the same energy towards teaching emotional awareness and effective expression. The ability to manage emotions and express them in healthy ways is not a genetic trait—it is a learned response that requires support from you. The same amount of time put towards concept comprehension must also be applied to teaching emotional literacy. Keep in mind you don’t have to make this separate. The more we can incorporate social emotional opportunities into teaching academics, the better. Students tend to learn better when they can connect their learning to real life situations.

Remember what got you into the field of education and why you stay. You care about your students and you want them to be as successful as possible. Teaching them how to be emotionally literate is a critical skill to life success. Continue to be awesome!

The recent publications of Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment (ASCD, 2016) and the article “Address trauma with calm, consistent care: Strategies to help educators avoid burnout while keeping students learning-ready” (Principal magazine, March/April, 2015) have strengthened Kristin’s impact in education.

For more information or to book Kristin for a speaking engagement or professional development services, she can be reached via email at ksouers@comcast.net or via phone at (509) 990-8933.
An Overview of Implementation Literacy

by Hannah Gbenro

“Hmm. I don’t see how this approach is any different from what we did last year.”

“All we do is sit in meetings and talk about getting things done – we don’t actually make decisions and get things done!”

“We just need to go to one-to-one technology then all of our students would be better equipped to be college and career ready.”

If I had a dollar for every time I heard someone say something like this, I’d be rich! In reality, the reason these statements sound so familiar is they summarize feelings and perceptions that are a natural part of every single change. Terms like “innovation” are common in today’s learning landscape. Although the innovation itself might look different over time, the idea of implementing change within Pk-12 settings is not new.

Every innovation involves implementing something to create change in hopes of creating, at the end of the day, more high school graduates who are college, career, and community ready. In education, we try to implement innovations that are evidence-based practices and interventions because we want to create change and see the difference in our classrooms, schools, and districts. Too often, though, we move forward with an innovation, while overlooking the science behind the implementation of that evidence-based innovation (Gbenro, 2013; Fixsen et al, 2005). This oversight, or lack of implementation literacy, causes misconceptions, miscommunications, and ultimately failure that leads to either (a) the introduction of a different innovation to solve the original problem or (b) new problems.

Implementation literacy reduces the likelihood of failure for new innovations. In order to be literate in implementing innovations, educators leading the way need to:

- Gain proficiency with implementation frameworks and evaluation strategies
- Develop cross-functional relationships to support collaborative approaches
- Understand how to shift a culture within simple and complex educational systems
- Understand the implementation cycle

Let’s go deeper with each of these concepts and make meaning of their application within our districts and schools

Implementation Frameworks and Evaluation Strategies

If you’re not sure where to start when thinking about a framework for implementing and monitoring the implementation of your innovation – that’s okay, I’ll let you in on a secret: implementation frameworks already exist! This is fantastic because you don’t have to start from scratch! Below are frameworks I’ve found helpful. These frameworks can be applied to many different innovations. Educational leaders who are implementation literate are knowledgeable about different innovation frameworks and use the best framework to ensure a successful implementation.

- Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 2011): CBAM is based on over 30 years of research in PK-College settings. The focus of this research, and CBAM, is providing tools and techniques that equip leaders to gauge staff concerns and program use in order to give each teacher the necessary support to ensure the successful implementation of innovations. Innovation Configuration Maps, Stages of Concern, and Levels of Use are core to the foundation of CBAM. More: www.sedl.org/cbam


Examples of innovations

1. an updated curriculum
2. different technology
3. a 7 period schedule
4. a new student information system
5. shifting the role of your Teacher Librarians
6. a new program to support English Language Learners
7. an updated district assessment system
8. a new instructional framework
9. updated approaches to grading
10. new policies for student behavior

An innovation doesn’t have to be new to the field of education, it just needs to be new for you and your school/district.
IS involves the study of different elements and factors influencing the full and effective use of innovations within a classroom, school, or district. Implementation Science is designed to identify what is needed to support a successful implementation, and examine the extent to which innovations are being used. Fissens Stages of Implementation are a fundamental component of IS. More: nirn.fpg.unc.edu

- Developmental Evaluation (Patton, 2010): DA was designed to support the implementation of innovations in education, with a focus on providing educational leaders with a framework to adapt implementations to real-time emerging and dynamic realities within our complex educational systems. DA provides a foundation for using evaluative questioning, thinking, and data to support implementation literate leaders in facilitating systemic, data-based reflection and decision-making.

Cross-Functional Teaming
A cross-functional team involves leaders who specialize in different functions within the school or district (Anderson, 2012). A successful cross-functional team can make a huge difference when implementing an innovation. On the other hand, a cross-functional team can easily go awry without a strong foundation — it might feel like everyone is “speaking a different language” and this quickly becomes a barrier to growing innovation. Educational leaders who are implementation literate often employ the following strategies to support success with cross-functional teams:

- Identify a facilitator who can keep the group focused on the common goal through cooperative grouping strategies and intentional use of data.
- Develop common agreements (or norms) to support the meeting time and ongoing communication amongst team members.
- Leverage the strengths of team members — this engages each individual. Provide opportunities for team members to equip and teach each other about their expertise within the context of working toward the common goal (Bellman & Ryan, 2009).

Implementation Cycle
Finally, as educators progress through the stages of implementation within an identified framework such as CBAM or Implementation Science, implementation literate leaders understand how to engage educators to continuously work through the Implementation Cycle: Plan > Do > Learn > Act. Here are some guiding questions that implementation literate educational leaders often consider at each phase of the implementation cycle.

- Plan: What is the desired state of implementation? How will we know we’ve reached this desired state? What practices and processes can we systematize? How does implementing this innovation further the mission of our district? What is the evidence this innovation can be effective elsewhere? What evidence-based implementation framework are we using to ensure the innovation is effective? How are we laying the foundation to ensure this innovation is effective within our schools and district? What are the potential benefits and risks of implementing this innovation? How will we mitigate risks? How are we

Examples of Cross-Functional Teams
- School Example: A task force designing, implementing, & monitoring the impact of innovative spaces. Team members: building administrator, classroom teacher, teacher librarian, student, parent.
- District Example: A team responsible for the rollout, implementation, and monitoring the impact of one-to-one technology to support blended learning. Team members: District leaders from technology, teaching and learning, communications, and human resources. School leaders representing building administration, classroom teachers, teacher librarians, and instructional coaches.

Ideas for telling the story and shifting the culture
- Videos and photos that archive the transition
- Newsletter articles
- Public or internal website housing transition documents and providing transparency
- Written and visual updates targeted for specific sets of stakeholders

Implementation Cycle

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assessing, and communicating, the need for the innovation? How will we communicate progress about this project with others? How are we ensuring valid and reliable processes are used throughout the implementation?

- **Do:** How will we communicate as a team? How are we leveraging the strengths of a cross-functional team? How are we valuing functional diversity and promoting effective communication practices? How are we laying the foundation for this change to be adopted and truly shift practice? How are we engaging, equipping, and empowering team members? How are we tapping into the knowledge, talents, and diverse perspectives of team members? How are we intentionally creating, and supporting, second-order change? How are we framing the message for different sets of stakeholders? How are we laying the foundation for the cultural shift at each level (artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, basic underlying assumptions)?

- **Learn:** To what extent is this innovation being implemented? What implementation data supports our understanding of the extent to which the innovation is implemented? What results data do we have so far? How can we use our implementation data as a lens through which to review our results data?

- **Act:** Based on what we know about the extent to which the innovation is currently being implemented, what do we need to adjust moving forward? How will we document that we made these adjustments? What additional supports and/or resources are needed to make this a successful implementation? What policies, practices, and systems need to be adjusted moving forward? (Additional Guiding Questions from the “Do” implementation stage are applicable here.)

**References**


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Visit [www.wsascd.org](http://www.wsascd.org) and click on **Member Benefits** for more information.
At the beginning of every school year teachers everywhere teach the rules and procedures for their classroom because they don’t assume the kids know them. Teachers are very sensitive not to assume background knowledge for students in many content areas. Take for example writing. Should a teacher assume that students can write a complete sentence, and base the instruction on that assumption, later to find out that they were wrong?

I have certainly been guilty of this. As a second grade teacher, I assumed that my students were able to write complete sentences with correct punctuation. I felt frustrated when I watched my students write and their capitals, periods, and spaces were non-existent. Students were able to hear their errors when these sentences were read back to them. They would often say, “That doesn’t make sense! I meant to say…….” However, they were often unable to transfer their thinking clearly to the page. I have since come to realize, with help from writing workshops, that I could not assume prior knowledge and skills were present when it came to writing. I need to review what a sentence is, just like I review the rules and procedures of my classroom.

I now start my first week of school with a review called, “What is a Super Sentence?” I use community building activities to support a review of basic writing skills as students write descriptive sentences about themselves and their classmates. Below, I share an overview of this review process.

**OPENING UP THE WRITER’S WORKSHOP: AN OVERVIEW OF ONE APPROACH**

**DAY 1: Where do capitals belong?**

I start by passing out cards with capital letters to my students. Next, using the document camera, I present sentences such as “what is your favorite animal?” and ask my students to identify the problem with the sentences. Once students recognize that a capital is needed, the student with the capital “W” raises their hand and says, “The beginning of this sentence needs my capital “W” because it is the first word in a sentence.” Using the same structure, together we correct all the sample sentences and generalize a class rule for how to use capitals at the beginning of a sentence.

**DAY 2: Punctuation**

The routine I established on day 1 is revisited on day 2. My instructional focus is now the end of a sentence. I give students cards with periods, question marks and exclamation marks. On sentence strips I again write sentences, for example, I like playing outside, and I ask my students to identify the problem in the sentences. The student with the correct end punctuation mark card leads the class through the needed correction. The class session closes with a generalized rule that all sentences must end with a punctuation mark.

**Day 3: Space between the words**

On this day, I write sentences using sentence strips with no spaces between words. In very small groups, students cut the words apart and glue them onto another sentence strip using spaces. This activity leads to a discussion about the function of white space between words and the difficulty in reading and understanding a message with no spaces.

**Day 4: Does that make sense?**

The goal for day 4 is to encourage students to re-read their work and self-monitor. I purposely write sentences for my students that make no sense. For example, I went park to play. The class takes turns reading these sentences and determining if they make sense and then they write revisions where needed to improve clarity.

**Day 5 Time to review our learning and move onto the next stage of our workshop**

Students ask me questions about myself. Their job is to speak and also to listen. I explain that good writers are also good listeners because in order to reflect on the feedback, good listening is necessary. After I talk about myself for about 10 minutes, I use Guided Language Acquisition Design (G.L.A.D.) strategies. Partners are given two different color markers to write a “super sentence” about me. It can only be facts that were stated. When we come back as a team, I have another piece of paper where I write the heading of Ms. Stannard. I quickly explain
what a topic sentence is for this activity with the understanding that additional instruction on topic sentence construction and identification would come later. For this activity, the topic sentence is given. “My teacher is Ms. Stannard.” Partners present their sentence after checking if the capitals, spaces and punctuation is done. We next read aloud to make certain the sentence makes sense. At the conclusion of the lesson, the students have a firm understanding of the required elements of a sentence and as a bonus, I am able to show how more than two sentences can turn into a paragraph. In order to access their understanding, students are given a graphic organizer entitled, “All about me!” After completing the organizer, where 3 or more sentences are written, they share their sentences with the class.

**Conclusion:** What I learned can be a reminder that at the beginning of the year, when it is necessary to review expectations, it is also important to review foundational writing skills such as to what constitutes a sentence. Learning to write well is developmental, just the same as learning skills in math or learning to decode. Assuming all students have a strong foundation in writing skills because of their age or grade, is setting them up to fail. Instead, taking the time to review or teach those foundational skills early in the school year, allows the remainder of the writer’s workshop to go smoothly as students are able to build on those basic skills to improve their writing.

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As I looked around my empty 6th grade classroom in June, I was struck by how different and stark it appeared. Gone were the warm fabric-covered reading corner walls with the soft lamplight spotlighting the array of high interest books for perusing. Gone, too, were the discussion-stimulating tables, stacks of chart paper filled with student thinking and learning, and the State ELA Standards. Surrounding the Standards had been student examples of approaching, meeting, and exceeding standard along with suggestions for goals to set. They were all gone, but one missing part struck me the most. The voices. The quiet hum of purposeful voices discussing, coaching, questioning, explaining, citing evidence, describing the joy of being lost in a beautifully written story, and learning. The voices, some heavily accented, some halting and shy, trying out new techniques, new ideas, new words. That was what I was truly missing.

We had had a very good year. We cemented long term friendships, and mentor relationships. Many students had been successful in their academic growth goals, and were going on to middle school better prepared and with higher confidence than many of them had thought possible in September. The students who hadn’t quite met their goals yet, had had coaching to strengthen their skills, had been given new tools with which to fight their battles, and encouraged to keep trying and building. A good year.

I thought back to September as I was meeting them for the first time, and how overwhelmed I had been at the task set before me. I was the ELA Literacy teacher for all three 6th grade classrooms. Our numbers were a little low so instead of 90 students, I only had 76. Within those 76, there were hugely diverse cultural backgrounds and first languages (English, Marshallese, Egyptian Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish), multiple skill levels, diverse behavior and emotional needs, and 85% of my students came from households immersed in poverty with all the obstacles that can include. I was petrified by the sheer volume of needs my students had, and worried that I would not be able to meet them all.

Then, I took a deep breath, tried to pull out all the learning and researching I had done in preparation to take my National Boards, and dove in. I remembered reading Instruction That Works by Marzano, et. al, and how research showed that great gains in academic scores across content areas were produced when the students were explicitly taught the skills of comparing and contrasting, so we emphasized those skills using part of a series by Harvey J. Silver on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) called: Compare and Contrast: Teaching Comparative Thinking to Strengthen Student Learning. Then back to Marzano with The Art and Science of Teaching and his framework that included Routines and procedures. There were daily read-alouds and think-alouds, Positive Behavior Intervention routines and rituals, building trust and community. We grouped our students into three groups, and rotated these groups. I taught ELA Literacy, one of my colleagues taught Science and Social Studies through ELA Informational, and the other colleague taught the math.

Using the techniques I had gleaned from Lucy Calkins’ fabulous Units of Study, I established Reading and Writing Workshops. I looked at our initial assessments and went about planning my interventions, mini lessons, and other instruction to match the standards and the holes. We didn’t have an adopted ELA curriculum, just the standards, a pacing guide for writing, and an assessment calendar. (We have since adopted a new curriculum).

I spent my days in the “Traveling Chair” going from table to table while they were in varying stages of writing projects, or in their leveled “Book Clubs”. I carried sticky notes to write down coaching, areas of focus, or new goals for each of the students in the group. They would produce the stickies from last session and show me where they had worked on a goal, responded to their reading, annotated, compared, contrasted, or whatever else the coaching had entailed. We asked critical thinking questions and answered them citing text evidence. My mini lessons were on thinking strategies (a la Ellin Keene), text structures, academic vocabulary, elaboration, dialogue, elements of writing, or anything else they needed to help them progress. Using the strategies I learned from our GLAD and ELL Strategies trainings, we illustrated, gestured, and color-coded our way to understanding. I modified, differentiated, built decoding, comprehension, and fluency skills, discussed,
explained, modeled, listened, and laughed. Almost every session involved laughter.

My evenings were spent searching, researching, calling, and lots and lots of talking. Pulling up my observations from the day and trying to find new ideas, new research as to best practice, trying to help move a student along the continuum who was stalling or regressing. Talking to families, interpreters, ELL specialists, Title I interventionists looking for ways to help, arranging for additional instruction time to help a student keep moving. Many of my students had been exposed to trauma, and had emotional, behavioral, and self-regulation difficulties. I worked with my building care teams, our Special Services Department, and my principal and colleagues trying to minimize the eruptions and maximize the learning for all. I had an MIT candidate working with me and we spent many a late afternoon coming up with behavior plans and ways to help students self-regulate. I had never worked so hard in my life.

Yet, by June, thanks to the strong relationships we had built, and the “team” approach to educating a class of children one child at a time, we had found a way to make it work for these kids, for this year, for these needs. I had learned so much since September. I had been so worried about being able to meet all the needs by myself. I didn’t have to. I could count on support and ideas from my team: intervention specialists, colleagues, Special Services, my principal, my MIT candidate, families, and community. By using the Workshop instructional techniques, I had been able to differentiate for academic and even emotional/behavioral needs, and helped keep the love of reading and writing alive. I had become way more organized because I had to keep track of so many goals and progress monitor the growth, but I KNEW where each student was and next steps. And through it all, I had built lasting, positive relationships with my students. I knew them. In knowing them, I could reach them. I needed a toolbox: Knowledge of Students, Team, Strong Pedagogy, Community, Humor, and Caring. These tools made all the difference.

Next year, I knew I would not be in this classroom. I had accepted a new challenge to become the Title I interventionist for fifth and sixth grade ELA. It made me a little sad to think I would not be the Classroom Teacher, searching, analyzing, creating, designing, coaching, and laughing. But then I realized I will still be a very important part of the team and contributor to the toolbox. There will still be mentorship, bonding, searching, coaching, workshops, book clubs, family communications, strategies, and gaps to be bridged. And laughter. There will always be laughter.

Each year, WSASCD provides a forum for educators in our state to read and write about topics of interest to our members. Check out these articles, which are available on the WSASCD website.

Tenet: Engaged: Why STEM?
Tenet: Healthy: How Does Social Emotional Learning Intersect with School Mental Health?
Tenet: Supported: TPEP 2.0: Is a Growth Mindset Just for Students?
Tenet: Engaged: Why Do I Want to Be a Teacher?
Tenet: Engaged: How Can the Use of Inclusive Language Reduce Bullying?
Tenet: Support: How Do I Prepare Myself to Teach in an Inclusive Classroom?
Tenet: Engaged: Why is it Important to Teach Native History and Culture?
Tenet: Supported: What is the True Meaning of Discipline?

Check our Blog at http://wsascdorg.blogspot.com/ or download a PDF at http://wsascd.org/critical-question-articles/
Imagine a math classroom. The picture in your mind probably reverts back to your childhood of memorizing times tables, doing long division and reading black and white worksheets filled with problems. These are the memories and experiences of our K-12 teachers and often the experiences of our students today. As educators, we often teach the way we were taught. This focus on skills first is akin to a reading lesson that never moves beyond phonics or reading nonsense words day after day and never encouraging comprehension of literary texts. Mathematical learning can be so much more.

In order to help develop a math literate society, students need to attend to more than procedural learning. In the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, rigor is one of three significant shifts demanding equal attention to procedural, conceptual and application-based learning (National Governors Council, 2010). Traditional methods of sit and get or endless reams of procedural worksheets do little to deepen conceptual understanding, nor do they allow for application of mathematics in real-world situations. This reinforces the view of mathematics as a tool, or subject to be memorized and studied in isolation. Discourse and argumentation is a practice that allows students to engage in deeper understanding about mathematical ideas and to build discipline-based literacy across subject areas.

Defining Discourse

Discourse in mathematics has a long history wherein mathematical ideas and theories are studied and explained verbally, through writing, or using models. Traditionally, this communication occurs from teacher to student in the form of examples, lectures, and questioning. As teachers, our understanding of mathematical ideas is reinforced through our communication to students. Likewise, when students are encouraged to engage in mathematical discourse with each other, they deepen their own understanding of concepts. This discourse does not have to be strictly verbal but should be focused on communicating understanding. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2014) states:

“Mathematical discourse includes the purposeful exchange of ideas through classroom discussion, as well as through other forms of verbal, visual, and written communication. The discourse in the mathematics classroom gives students the opportunities to share ideas and clarify understandings, construct convincing arguments regarding why and how things work, develop a language for expressing mathematical ideas, and learn to see things from other perspectives” (p. 29).

The idea of discourse as a social learning practice reinforces the belief that learning occurs through the interaction and renegotiation of experiences with how students understand the world. Discourse allows students to communicate understanding and evaluate it based on the experiences and reasoning of peers.

The Overlap of Math, Science, and ELA Practices

Discourse is also a linking practice for academic disciplines in the classroom. Chuek’s (2013) analysis of learning practices in Science, Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) found commonalities in student practices across disciplines. The practice of discourse and argumentation overlaps these disciplines (Figure 1) as students use evidence to communicate and support their reasoning.

This overlap reinforces the idea that discourse is a practice that deepens learning and understanding. The precise communication of student thinking with evidence transcends disciplines and is a key practice that teachers should use no matter the content of a lesson.

Discourse as a tool for literacy across disciplines: Strategies and examples from the math classroom

by Ryan Seidel
Three Strategies from the Math Classroom

Below are three strategies that I have used in our district to help promote evidence-based discourse, building literacy in mathematics across all three components of rigor. Though we use them in mathematics lessons, they can (and should) be adapted for use across other disciplines.

**Number Talks.** This classroom routine is a structured discussion that helps build number fluency by eliciting and building on student strategies. Typically the teacher displays a mental math problem (e.g. 23 +14) and asks students to solve the problem mentally. The teacher then elicits strategies from students seeking and building on different understandings of the procedures. Students can ask questions of each other encouraging justification of their strategies. In our schools, teachers frequently cite that fluency in number sense skills is the restrictive factor in deepening understanding. If a student, engaged in a mathematical problem, spends all their cognitive energy adding two fractions as one step in the problem, they are unable to take away any greater understanding being developed by the whole process. Number talks help build the conceptual understanding and procedural fluency in basic operations thereby allowing students to be more successful in more complex problems.

**Card Matching.** Matching activities are instructional routines that ask students to sort through a stack of cards with multiple representations of mathematical ideas (Figure 2) and to match groups of cards that represent the same idea or have a common attribute. Worked on in groups, this routine encourages discussions about the structure of each representation deepening conceptual understanding. As a routine, card matching allows teachers...
to reuse the lesson structure with a variety of content to create the cards and students become proficient at using language to compare attributes.

**Rich Tasks.** The use of procedure based worksheets provides students with repetitive opportunities that reinforce skills; but frequently after the first few problems learning is only reinforced, not deepened. Rich tasks provided students with a low-entry, high-exit experience that allows for multiple approaches and a deepening understanding of the mathematics involved (Henningsen, & Stein, 1997). Typically these tasks are scaffolded to allow a wide variety of students to engage in the problem but also allow for increased difficulty as students work. In one such problem I asked students from 3rd grade through AP Calculus if a straw cut in two places would form a triangle. All these students were able to enter the task and begin exploration of the Triangle Inequality Theorem. Depending on the grade level, students were able to deepen their understanding, thinking about the different types of triangles, the conditions for successfully creating one and even the probabilities that one would be created given random cuts. This task, and many like it, allow for an engagement in mathematics that promotes discussion and argumentation, deepening understanding of mathematics.

**Impact and Significance**
Eric Hoffer wrote that, “in times of change, learners will inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists.” By focusing on common practices such as discourse, we develop procedural, conceptual and application based understanding that equips students with the literacy necessary to engage mathematical learning. In your classes and schools, I encourage you to move beyond procedural learning. Use discourse as a tool for building experiences that can deepen mathematical literacy.

**Resources for discourse in mathematics.**

- **100 Math Discourse Questions.** Question stems for use by teachers and students to promote discussion about mathematical ideas.
- **Levels of Classroom Discourse Rubric.** An overview of key components in mathematical classroom discourse including characteristic levels of performance.
- **Nrich.** A collection of mathematical tasks organized by age level and strands of mathematics designed to encourage the application and exploration of mathematics.

**Five Practice for Orchestrating Productive Mathematical Discourse**
(Stein, Engle, Smith & Hughes 2008). A framework for implementing classroom activities to promote discourse and deepening understanding.

**References**


Literacy... In today’s world, there are many ways a person can be considered literate, including the common understanding of literacy related to reading and writing. It really comes down to the 21st century skills needed to become a productive person in life. Thinking in terms of mathematical literacy, computer literacy, social literacy and so many others, it seems that when it comes to literacy of any type, children who live in poverty are at an extreme disadvantage for becoming literate individuals.

We know that working with children living in poverty requires educators to be involved in every aspect of their lives, both academic and personal. Due to their lack of experience with poverty, educators often fail to acknowledge the influence that poverty can have on academic achievement. Students who are living in poverty are not always given the foundation they need to succeed in school.

As educators, we know that children’s brain development is influenced by life experiences. Poverty is a life experience that causes the kind of stress that interferes with how parents and children interact with each other and can undermine a parent’s efforts to create the kind of positive learning environment that all parents want for their children. This, among a myriad of other reasons relative to poverty, contributes to illiteracy related to every 21st century skill.

Educators can learn more about how to transform schools into places that better meet the needs of children of poverty. Developing awareness in our schools begins with school personnel who are unequivocally committed to equity. This commitment starts with a better understanding of the meaning and influence of poverty in the lives of the students they serve.

It is this reality that motivated the Washington State ASCD Board of Directors to begin providing more professional learning opportunities related to understanding poverty. For many years, WSASCD has focused on a whole child approach to learning and teaching, so it is no surprise that with the increased level of poverty in our state, there is more to learn about what it really means to ensure that children are healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged.

Throughout this school year, WSASCD will offer learning opportunities related to increasing our understanding of poverty in our schools and what can be done to support our students.

- The Washington Teachers’ Conference on November 5th will serve as the first venue related to this theme. Co-authors Dr. Kathleen Budge and Dr. William Parrett will serve as keynote speakers and share their expertise related to their book entitled, Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools.

- WSASCD will then co-sponsor a 2-Day ASCD Institute entitled, Disrupting Poverty: Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools on Tuesday-Wednesday, November 29-30. Kent School District will host this event at the Kent Phoenix Academy.

- Beginning in February, WSASCD will offer schools and districts the opportunity to be involved in a Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS), which is a unique tool that helps people to begin to understand what life is like with a shortage of money and an abundance of stress. We hope to help educators develop an understanding of the day-to-day reality of poverty to increase awareness and better understand our students and families.

We, as Washington State ASCD, believe that becoming literate in all 21st century skills can be improved with a better understanding and support for our students who live in poverty. Join us this year, as we endeavor to learn more about how to support and influence learning for children of poverty.
Spring Edition: March 15, 2017

Theme: Data-Driven Decision Making to Improve Educational Outcomes for All Learners

The next issue of Curriculum in Context will address the expanding role of data in making informed decisions that impact all aspects of the educational system. According to a white paper published by Sagebrush Corporation entitled, “Data-Driven Decision Making: A Powerful Tool for School Improvement” (2016), today’s schools are finding that careful attention to reading and interpreting data supports efforts to:

- Narrow achievement gaps
- Improve curriculum
- Communicate educational issues more effectively
- Promote parental involvement and support of school efforts
- Increase school efficiency
- Enhance teacher performance

Data-driven decision making systems collect data from a variety of sources and from both informal and formal tools. Schools then develop storage systems that foster easy access to collected data and support data analysis. In addition, effective storage systems allow collected data to be extrapolated to inform decisions across the school such as professional development, teacher certification and specializations, student learning plans, student disciplinary referrals, curriculum mapping, and more.

This issue of Curriculum in Context will focus on how schools are developing and implementing data-driven decision making systems to enhance overall school effectiveness and to support achievement for all learners. Authors are invited to address any aspect of data-driven decision making. These are just some of the questions that you might consider when submitting an article or book review for consideration. The editorial staff invites you to submit a manuscript on this topic to Lori Johnson, Ed.D. lorijohnson@whitworth.edu by March 15, 2017.